

# Economic analysis of poverty trend in Nigeria from 1980–2018

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**Ayalogu Nkiru Vivian, Robinson MO, Kalu Ijeoma Emele**

## ABSTRACT

Poverty has been an issue from times past. People have wondered why individuals have been unable to break free from the shackles of poverty. This paper looks at the possible causes of poverty. It does so by first examining the opinions of various scholars through theories propounded by them and then examines how these impacts on the types of poverty. It also looks at those affected by poverty and some of the causes of poverty. After that, the paper then looks at the trends of poverty in Nigeria and examines how the various types of poverty considered have progressed over a specified time frame (from 1980–2018). From the trends analysed, it was discovered that poverty thrived most in the rural areas. It is recommended that a way out of such a predicament is to ensure that programmes and policies are properly implemented so that the level of poverty can decline gradually.

**Keywords:** Urban Poverty, Rural Poverty, Core Poverty.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a common phenomenon that has plagued the economies of many countries, Nigeria not excluded. Its definition varies as authors view it from different angles and perspectives. According to previous studies, poverty refers to a situation where people can't meet their basic needs such as sufficient food for consumption, a roof over their heads, water suitable for drinking, a sound education and job opportunities. It can also be seen as the inability to have access to the bare necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, adequate health care services as well as gainful employment. Poverty can be split into two namely: Absolute poverty and relative poverty. Pettinger, (2019) saw absolute poverty as the inability of income earned by the head of a household to sufficiently purchase the basic needs of the home such as food, shelter, clothing, education of children etc.; while relative poverty is when the income of a household is below a certain level earmarked as the median level.

Poverty has persisted despite the adoption of several alleviation programmes which include:

Accelerated Food Production Programme (AFPP)

Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)

River Basin Development Authority (RBDA)

Green Revolution (GR)

Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Zero Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER)

People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), just to mention a few (Aibieyi and Dirusu, 2010).

Despite the implementation of such programmes, poverty remains prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria not excluded. Sometimes this could be due to changes in average income and inequitable distribution of income. This paper takes a look at poverty, some theories of poverty that can provide understanding of its origin and causes, looking at the trend of poverty over a period of time (1980-2018) to ascertain its impact on the Nigerian economy. Finally, possible solutions on how to reduce the ever-rising rate of poverty are discussed.

### Literature review

According to United Nations (2011), poverty refers to the inability of getting choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means not having sufficient funds to eat, purchase clothing, obtain an education and afford health care services and habiting in unsuitable living conditions.

Poverty can be classified into various types namely: Absolute Poverty, Relative Poverty, Income Poverty, Asset Poverty, Urban Poverty, Rural Poverty and Core Poverty. Absolute poverty occurs when the income accruing to a household is below a certain acceptable level set by society. This makes it difficult for a household or individual to have access to basic necessities such as potable water, comfortable accommodation, food, ability to attend educational institutions as well as basic healthcare services. Relative poverty looks at poverty that exists when different family units receive less than 50% of the amount set as median income for the typical household. This type of poverty, however, can improve if the economic condition of the country in which the household resides improves. It is also known as "relative deprivation" and as such not everybody within this category is extremely poor (Relative vs. Absolute Poverty, 2019).

Income poverty is the type of poverty which arises if the income received for work done is below a country's poverty line (UNDP 1997). Poverty line, according to Cambridge Dictionary, (2023) is the level of income set by a given country as being sufficient for the consumption of basic necessities. Asset poverty, which is both an economic and social condition, is more common than income poverty. It looks at the inability of a family unit to have sufficient wealth to provide for its basic needs over a period of three months (Asset Poverty, 2022).

Urban poverty refers to the type of poverty that is found in industrialised cities. It is as a result of several factors which include setting up of suitable living conditions, increase in self-sufficiency, social fragmentation as well as the dualisation of the labour market. Rural Poverty is the poverty that exists in the hinterlands of a country, colloquially referred to as a "village" setting. It has the features of inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure, inaccessibility to markets as well as spread out populations (Rural Poverty, 2023). Core Poverty exists for those that are so poor that they are caught up in the web of the vicious cycle of poverty. To the core poor, limiting factors do not only exist but they are related in such a way that disengaging them is difficult if not impossible. This implies that they will find it hard to break free from the shackles of poverty and thus remain within it, unless the unexpected occurs.

The above-mentioned types of poverty can be identified within developed and developing countries, though more pronounced in developing countries. A high incidence of poverty exists in both developed and developing countries today. The incidence of poverty is usually high among the young, the aged, the uneducated, the unemployed, the working poor, the non-working poor and the disabled (Gbosi, 2006).

### *The Young*

The incidence of poverty is usually pronounced in young families, where the head of the family is about 35 years or younger. In such cases, it may not always be easy to make ends meet as family heads within this category lack education and relevant work experience.

### *The Aged*

Most families headed by persons of 65 years of age and above frequently lack sufficient income to efficiently run their homes. This may be due to the fact that the head of the home may have retired or passed on. However, most of the people that belong to this category of "Aged poor" may have access to private or public retirement programmes, which will enable them to own their own homes or live in rented rooms and apartments.

***The Uneducated***

It is usually argued that there is a direct relationship between education and income received. It can be said that poverty and level of education have an inverse relationship. Therefore, the higher the levels of education, the higher the level of income earned and the lower the level of education, the lower the level of income. Thus, a lack of education attracts poverty.

***The Unemployed***

If one is gainfully employed, he earns wages that can sustain his family. If the opposite is the case and lasts for a prolonged period of time, the family head will have to draw on past savings to support his family, which will deplete his savings and lead to a drastic cut in their living standard (Gbosi, 2006).

***The Working Poor***

It had been stated earlier that when a person works, they will earn an income, but in most countries, a job is not a guarantee that the income earned will be sufficient to sustain a family. In Nigeria today, many people with jobs are unable to feed three times a day.

***The Non-Working Poor***

If those who are working are unable to meet their basic needs, imagine the plight of those who don't have gainful employment. Many families lose hope, rely on welfare and not included among the labour force. The poverty incidence is usually high in this group.

***Rural People***

Those in the rural areas usually lack access to basic amenities such as water, electricity and access to good health care services. As such, the incidence of poverty is usually higher in families that live in rural areas than those that reside in urban areas. It is generally concluded that poverty rates in the rural areas are twice as much as that experienced in the urban areas.

***The Disabled***

People who are disabled usually experience a higher incidence of poverty than those that are fully able bodied and of a sound mind. Many disabled people live off the benevolence of friends and relatives. From the above classification, it can be inferred that the incidence of poverty is higher among the unemployed, the non-working poor, rural dwellers and the uneducated (Gbosi, 2006).

There is no one single cause or determinant of poverty. There are several factors that cause or contribute to a high incidence of poverty. They include low or negative economic growth, inappropriate macroeconomic policies, crowding out in the labour market resulting from limited job growth, low productivity and its low wages in the informal sector and a lag in human resource development, increase in crime and violence and environmental degradation (Ndiyo, 2008).

***Low economic growth performance***

The economy needs to grow for poverty to reduce. In developing countries, a high level of employment with an increasing export base will enhance growth which will cause a reduction in the level of poverty. Since the 1980s, it has been discovered that there has been a high level of volatility in the various economies of the world, which has led to low or negative growth rates. This is due to adverse terms of trade among countries, change in demand for exports among countries as well as changes in global interest rates on external debts. Cumulatively, these factors give rise to an ever-rising poverty level in the various countries of the world. However, if growth existed, it could curb poverty through increasing employment rates, higher labour productivity and the higher income generated from it.

***Macroeconomic Shocks and Policy Failure***

This is one of the major causes of poverty in various countries of the world. Many economies in the world face macroeconomic disequilibrium arising from balance of payment disequilibrium, terms of trade shocks as well as natural disasters. In this scenario, it is necessary to undertake policy reforms. This would cause such economies to become vulnerable to poverty. Monetary policies that prevent the poor from gaining access to credit facilities and fiscal policies that lead to the retrenchment of staff and factor substitution of labour for capital, exchange rate policies that encourage an increase in cost of domestic production in an economy that depends majorly on imports will have a negative impact on the poor. However, an exchange rate policy that boosts exports, which in turn could boost agriculture (which most of the poor are engaged in), will reduce poverty drastically. However,

devaluation of a currency done by an import dependent nation will lead to reduction in manufacturing capacity due to rising production costs which will lead to a high level of retrenchment of the labour force, which inadvertently worsens the rate of poverty (Ndiyo, 2008).

#### ***Labour Market Deficiencies***

The poor man's working tool is his labour skills. Most of the poor are unable to access a formal education or skills acquisition. This hampers their chances of getting a job that will help them a reasonable wage. They are thus unable to compete favourably in the labour market due to their lack of a formal education and access to skills and as such have to manage menial jobs and remain impoverished, unable to break out of the cycle of poverty (Ndiyo, 2008).

#### ***Unemployment and Underemployment***

If one is gainfully employed, sufficient income will be earned, thus enabling the person to break free from the cycle of poverty. However, many in poor countries are unable to get good jobs due to their lack of skills, low level of literacy, poor educational background, little or no access to medical facilities, geographical isolation as well as discrimination based on race, sex and other attributes. These could greatly hinder one's chances of getting employed. Also, some work beneath their capacity and capability just to ensure they earn a wage. This is known as underemployment and it greatly encourages poverty. Hence, unemployment is high amongst youths, those searching for formal jobs and female urban dwellers (Ndiyo, 2008).

#### ***Human Resource Development***

This is a key factor for one to break free from poverty. If one invests in human capital development, he will increase his chances of gaining a formal job which pays better than a menial job; raise his level of productivity as the skills acquired have increased as well as increasing his earning power, which leads to an improved standard of living. By providing additional educational opportunities for youths could lead to a reduction in crime rate, drugs and violence as it has been seen that most of those involved in crimes are school drop outs.

#### ***Migration***

Migration can help reduce the rate of poverty especially if those coming into an area are skilled workers. On the other hand it lead to a brain drain for the area which the exit from. This slows down economic growth and the process of job creation and as such affects the level of development in the county in the long run.

#### ***Ill Health/Disease***

Good health is necessary for higher productivity. Poor health makes a worker unable to carry out his functions, thus retarding economic growth and development. Diseases encourage poverty and reduce the amount of the working population, which is detrimental to any country.

#### ***Debt Burden***

Developing countries are greatly hampered by the ever-rising debt burden, both internal and external. Debt servicing alone has greatly reduced valuable resources that could have been used to boost production and create more employment opportunities. This leads to low productivity, low-capacity utilization, underemployment and low purchasing power which lead to increased levels of poverty (Ndiyo, 2008).

#### ***Governance***

Most developing countries experience some level of dictatorship and as such are unable to select leaders that will represent them in the helm of affairs. This has led to untold hardship, lack of transparency in leadership and poor allocation of resources as most of their funds are stolen and plundered and repatriated to other countries. As such poverty alleviation programmes become a caricature and are unable to bring about desired effects necessary in curbing poverty.

#### ***Environmental Degradation***

Poverty causes a high level of environmental degradation. Most natural resources get depleted for the poor to survive. These include forests, woodlands and rivers. As these resources are exploited, they reduce the amount of natural resources available at the

disposal of the masses, thus leading to increasing levels of poverty. The constant burning of fuels is also hazardous to the atmosphere and can cause air pollution.

### ***Crime and Violence***

Crime rates have been on the increase of recent and this has greatly reduced the quality of living in various countries. The urban poor are particularly susceptible to these social vices. There are serious social costs accruing to crime and violence. These include using public funds to beef up the police force, assistance to the prisons in form of food, clothing, etc., financing the judicial system and providing healthcare for those injured as a result of violence. This has also caused house owners to acquire security systems/dogs and scared foreign investors due to an unstable environment which is detrimental to the economy hence poverty still thrives (Ndiyo, 2008). It can be seen that there is no one cause of poverty, hence poverty is caused by a number of factors which are detrimental to the state of the economy. Next step is to discuss the theories of poverty, to enable a proper understanding of poverty, looking at its origin and how it had impacted on people over time.

## **2. THEORIES OF POVERTY**

### **Theory of Individual Deficiencies**

This Theory states that an individual is the cause of his or her own poverty situation (Addae-Korankye, 2019). Bradshaw, (2006) was of the opinion that those who were poor were responsible for the situation they found themselves in, adding that with the zeal to work hard and an ability to make better choices, their poverty situation could have been quickly averted. This theory has its foundation in the Capitalist system, which is American in origin. It is a system that was thought to provide fair chance for every individual.

Rank, (2004), opined that individualism was really focused on individuality with regards to basic things such as work and the need to acquire necessities such as food, shelter and medical services. It was also discovered that the theory was premised on American values and mores, which tilted towards independence in carrying out the basic functions of life and if one experienced individual poverty, it was as a result of lack of self-motivation.

This theory has been critiqued on the basis of the emergence of a new concept, inherited intelligence, which emerged in the nineteenth century. It was also known as eugenics movement which sought to rationalise poverty and justify individuals who seemed to have limited abilities (Bradshaw, 2006).

Dike, (2009) looked at it from the perspective that the negative attitudes exhibited by Nigerian youths towards technical and vocational skills made them unable to compete favourably in the labour market and as such they constituted a nuisance in the villages and cities while purportedly looking for unavailable jobs. This leads to an increase in crime and other social vices that are prevalent in Nigeria, both in the cities and in the villages (Danaan, 2018).

### **Theory of Cultural Belief Systems that support Sub-Cultures of Poverty**

This theory postulates that poverty is transmitted over generations and values, beliefs and skills that exist have links to societal existence but are individually held (Bradshaw, 2006). It asserts that the dysfunctionality that exists with both culture and subculture are to be blamed on individuals. It is worthy of note that this theory originated from Culture of Poverty.

This theory explains how the culture of poverty and social isolation encourage the existence of poverty among some social groups. The main criticism of this theory is that it blames the poor as being responsible for their state rather than social factors linked to poverty. Some cultures in Nigeria (amongst the igbos, yorubas, efiks, etc.) promote segregation amongst individuals based on their level of wealth and intellectuality and this causes some individuals to feel left out and abandon to strive to break free from the shackles of poverty.

### **Theory of Economic, Political and Social Distortions or Discrimination**

Those who propounded this theory believe that poverty is due to the larger socio-economic order (Abdulai and Shamshiry, 2014). They believed that poverty could be attributed to economic, political and social systems, which do not allow people to have equal access to opportunities, a reasonable income and enjoy wellbeing (Bradshaw, 2006). They argued that Capitalism provided an enabling environment for poverty to thrive and no matter how hard one worked, they remained poor (Bradshaw, 2006). In Nigeria, the policies formulated to alleviate poverty have been rather ineffective. This is due to poor review and poor implantation, as a result of which resources are being mismanaged and poverty has been on a steady increase (Danaan, 2018).

### Theory of Geographical Disparities

The theory asserts that poverty is said to exist because of differences in geographical locations. An ability to examine this in depth led to the emergence of *geography of poverty* (Abdulai and Shamshiry, 2014). Bradshaw, (2006) stated that "this cause of poverty represented rural poverty, ghetto poverty, urban disinvestment, southern poverty, third-world poverty and others that exist separate from other theories". It was also discovered that people, institutions and cultures are unable to have access to the necessary resources they need to survive and as such are deprived of redistributed wealth.

Some areas in Nigeria suffer from Natural disasters such as floods, draughts, erosion (e.g., Anambra state). The lack of provision of social amenities and skills empowerment have also led to the great level of disparity between the urban and rural areas, thus leading to an increase in the rural-urban migration (Danaan, 2018).

### Theory of Cumulative and Cyclical Interdependencies

Abdulai and Shamshiry, (2014) referred to this theory as the *Cyclical Theory of Poverty*. This type of poverty exists when people become impoverished due to unforeseen circumstances such as wars, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, etc. It also takes into cognisance the existence of health challenges due to insufficient funds to purchase drugs and access medical services, poor diet/nutrition and poor living conditions (Addae-Korankye, 2019).

It also exists when people are unable to get jobs and income, which could lead to depression (Bradshaw, 2006). As such, this is a theory that takes into consideration economic, health and social perspectives. In Nigeria, there exists a high dependency ratio which exerts a lot of pressure on the privileged few. As a result of this, they may engage in nefarious activities just to meet up with family and societal expectations. This will then lead to systemic failures and an ever-rising rate of poverty in Nigeria (Danaan, 2018).

Consequent upon all these theories of poverty, we can conclude that poverty is caused by certain factors which vary from individual to individual and include political, economic, social and cultural factors. As such, we can observe that poverty is a cause for concern and it has an identifiable pattern from one country to the other. This paper attempts to look at the trend of some types of poverty in Nigeria, with the aim of analysing its behaviour over a given time frame (from 1980-2018).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

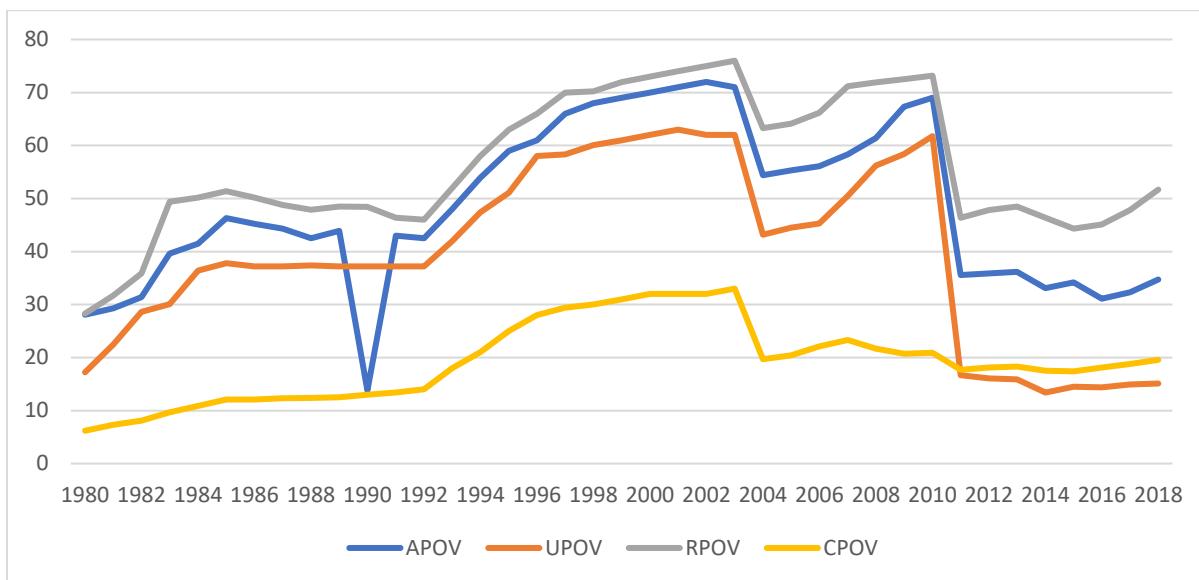
This study makes a use of time series data for a period of 38 years (1980-2018) from secondary sources. The two main sources of data are the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). Other sources include the Ministry of Finance, Debt Management Office (DMO) and the International Financial Statistics. This research involves looking at the trend of poverty over a period of 38 years. The most interesting part is that poverty is disaggregated, thus making the study comprehensive and insightful. We examine the trends on aggregate poverty, urban poverty, rural poverty and core poverty, aggregate poverty is a combination of urban poverty, rural poverty and core poverty, while urban poverty refers to the poverty that exists in urban cities and rural poverty refers to the type experienced in rural areas. Core poverty exists for those who are unable to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

### Trend analysis

Poverty has exhibited behavioural patterns all over the world, Nigeria not excluded. Most studies have been done to show how it has behaved over different time frames, using different variables. This study followed suit, looking at the behaviour of disaggregated poverty from 1980-2018 (Figure 1).

In Figure 1 the level of rural poverty was greater than that of urban poverty across the years of study. Rural poverty increased to 51.4% in 1985 and later declined to 46% in 1992 before getting to its peak of 76% in 2003. It then dropped slightly in 2011 and maintained a marginal increase all through the remaining period. It was followed by aggregate poverty which maintained a continuous increase till 1989 before a sharp decline in 1990. Thereafter, it increased and got to its peak in 2002. Aggregate poverty, however, followed a similar trend with rural poverty between 2011 and 2018. Urban Poverty rose to 37.8% in 1985 then increased marginally till 1992 before increasing to 63% in 2001. It dropped in 2011 and followed a similar trend as rural and aggregate poverty. Lastly, core poverty took the lowest poverty trend in Nigeria. It was noticed that poverty incidences are higher in the rural and urban areas than in the ghettos which experience core poverty.

From the graph, we can deduce that rural, aggregate, urban then core poverty followed suit in the top – bottom flow of the incidence of poverty in Nigeria. In other words, core poverty had the lowest poverty incidence. This is in line with the theories analysed, showing that poverty is truly a function of individual, social, economic, political and cultural factors.



**Figure 1** Trend in Aggregate, Urban, Rural and Core poverty in Nigeria (1980–2018)

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The ability to reduce the ever-escalating rate of poverty has been a major cause for concern for many international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. The World Bank estimated that 1.29 billion people were absolutely poor in 2008. About 400 million of these people live in India while 173 million live in China. In terms of percentage of regional population, about 47% of people in sub-Saharan Africa live in absolute poverty, which is the highest incidence rate of absolute poverty in 2008 (Poverty, 2015). According to National Bureau of Statistics, as at 2019, 40% of the total population which represents about 83 million people live below the country's poverty line of 137,430 (\$381.75) per year (World Bank, 2020). This goes to show that poverty is still a cause for concern all over the world, Nigeria not excluded. This study set out to look at the trend of disaggregated poverty from 1980 to 2018.

From an analysis of the trend of poverty in Nigeria from 1980-2018, it can be inferred that rural poverty was the most prevalent form of poverty, followed by aggregate poverty, then urban poverty and core poverty. The frequent movement of people from the rural to urban areas in Nigeria by young school leavers could be seen as one of the causes. This is a situation in which the young school leavers (usually O-level certificate holders) move from the rural communities to the urban areas in search of a better life and white-collar jobs. The development of infrastructure and rural areas should be the main focus of the Nigerian government in order to reduce the economic inequalities that exist between the rural and urban areas in Nigeria so as to make for equitable development and reduction in the high rate of poverty. As the trend analysis results shows, there are fluctuations, similar to what occurs in the business cycles, in the way poverty evolves with respect to the aggregate poor, urban poor, rural poor and the extremely poor or the core poor. It was further observed that the rate of non-poor in Nigeria in the 1980s is higher than what is obtainable in recent years, especially in the 1990s to 2000s. It was also discovered that the rate of the extremely poor increased in recent years compared to the 1980s. Specifically, the trend analysis showed that the core or extremely poor populace was 19.6% in 2018 compared to 6.2% and 12.1% in 1980 and 1985 respectively. This implies that despite the attempts at creating programmes and policies that were aimed at reducing poverty; the level of poverty within the country is still on the increase. One possible explanation would be that the poverty reduction policies were not suited to the peculiarities of the country and as such could not solve the persistent problem of poverty in the country. Another possible explanation is that those asked to implement and monitor the poverty reduction policies were unable to do so adequately. Therefore, poverty remains a ravaging phenomenon that is yet to be resolved.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

It can be seen that the rate of poverty varies from year to year and between the various types seen in the study. It has been a major cause for concern for countries over the world, Nigeria inclusive. It can be seen that though programmes and policies were put in place to try and reduce the ever-increasing rate of poverty, they were relatively ineffective as they didn't take into cognisance certain peculiarities and were barely monitored. Hence, it is advisable to create policies and programmes that fit the prevailing

poverty situation in Nigeria, implement them adequately and review them at regular intervals as found necessary so as to create an avenue to curb the ever-rising rate of poverty in Nigeria.

#### Informed consent

Not applicable.

#### Ethical approval

Not applicable.

#### Conflicts of interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

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The study has not received any external funding.

#### Data and materials availability

All data associated with this study are present in the paper.

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